

Jeopardy Assessment
for the Proposed Incidental Taking Permit
of the Butler's Gartersnake

Oak Creek Assembly of God Church
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Background

The state-threatened Butler's gartersnake, *Thamnophis butleri*, was listed in 1997 and is the smallest of the five Wisconsin gartersnake species. This species requires a moderately open to open canopy habitat, preferably with both upland and wetland habitat. Butler's naturally hibernate in open-canopy wetlands (sedge meadows, fringes of cattail marshes, etc.) but are also known to occupy sites that provide other means for successful overwintering (i.e. old landfills where conditions provide access below the frostline and where adequate moisture exists). Both sexes of this species reach maturity during their second full year and females deliver 4-19 live-born young in mid- to late summer.

The Butler's gartersnake is a colonial species that is restricted to several southeastern counties in Wisconsin. Most sites that have been moderately to heavily surveyed for Butler's show a healthy age-class structure, indicating that regular recruitment is occurring. Additional surveys and monitoring have found that Butler's gartersnakes often occur in very large numbers on even relatively small sites (i.e. 400+ snakes detected on a 20-acre site) and can occur, sometimes in high numbers, on highly disturbed and degraded sites. Populations on disturbed sites can most likely be sustained if the disturbance factors are eliminated and suitable wetlands are present on or adjacent to the sites.

Jeopardy Assessment

The proposed project involves expansion of the Oak Creek Assembly of God church building, parking lot, and stormwater detention pond. The expansion areas currently consist of paved parking lot, manicured lawn, and a managed stormwater detention basin. As a result, we anticipate that take of the snake will be extremely low. The Department has determined that the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence or recovery of the state population of these snakes or the whole plant-animal community of which they are a part. The benefits to public safety justify this superfund activity. The basis for this assessment is that the small habitat loss is unlikely to jeopardize the population at this site given the amount of remaining habitat and the fact that the loss is temporary.

Conservation Measures

A summary of the conservation measures that will be adhered to for the purpose of minimizing any adverse effect on the Butler's gartersnake are found below, for more specific information please refer to the Oak Creek Assembly of God Incidental Take Conservation Plan.

1. Snake removals were conducted to remove as many snakes as possible from the project area.
2. Snake exclusion fencing has been installed to prevent snakes from moving into the construction area.
3. Impacts to some areas of suitable habitat currently present will be minimized.
4. A "no mow" area will be established upon completion of the project. This will result in an overall gain of 5733 ft² of suitable habitat for the snake.
5. Habitat management will occur in the open canopy habitat to prevent natural succession and retain suitable snake habitat.